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Effects of Distracted Driving: A Personal Testimony

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, car accidents caused by distracted driving claimed over three thousand lives in 2017¹. As technology develops and its use increases, it seems likely that distracted driving will continue to kill and injure many more people in the years to come. While there is no formula for a set of laws that will guarantee an end to distracted driving, now is the time to take action towards making our roads a safer place.

I chose to write about this topic because my family recently commemorated the tenth anniversary of the car accident that nearly killed my dad and brother. On December 13, 2008, a distracted driver swerved into oncoming traffic, hitting my dad and brother in a head-on collision. Given the nature of the accident, both my dad and brother should have died, or at least have been severely disabled for life. The paramedics were shocked that they were alive, and they did not expect my dad to survive the ambulance ride to the hospital. He had sustained numerous serious injuries: his wrist was shattered, his foot was seriously broken, and he required stitches all over his body, among other things. Andrew, my barely four-year-old brother, had broken the C2 vertebra in his neck, just below his skull. An injury like this will either kill or paralyze a person almost one hundred percent of the time. However, the doctors were able to stabilize both my dad and brother, but months of recovery and therapy lay ahead.

¹ <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>



Today, ten years later, Andrew and my dad have made a miraculous recovery, with minimal lasting damage. My dad's wrist will never have the same range of motion as it did before the accident, and Andrew has a partially collapsed lung, but these have not prevented them from living normal, healthy lives. The legal side of the accident took five years to resolve, but that ordeal is finally over as well.



The second picture gives a good idea of how badly my dad was injured; looking closely, one can see his work boot smashed at the base of the seat. It amazes me that he can still walk today.

By the time the third picture was taken, my dad was already well on the road to recovery. My family is forever grateful for the intense medical care that



the doctors were able to provide for Andrew and my dad, working around the clock to keep them alive. Ultimately, we glorify God for preserving their lives in such a miraculous way.

Photos courtesy of Katherine Rourke; used with permission.

I shared my family's personal story because it is the reason I care about decreasing the amount of distracted driving that endangers so many lives. While my story has a happy ending, most families are not so fortunate. Laws to prevent distracted driving are tricky because they can be difficult to enforce. The Canadian province of Ontario has very strict laws about cell phone use on the road. Penalties for cell phone use include fines and license suspension. These laws are relatively new, so there is no concrete data yet regarding their impact on the yearly number of accidents in Ontario. While the effect of these laws has yet to be proven, I think it is a step in the right direction. The general public should also be kept well informed of the devastation that distracted driving can cause. Laws cannot cover all types of distractions. For example, there was no cell phone involved in the accident I just described. When it comes to non-technology related distractions, I think education such as well-constructed public service announcements could

prove valuable. If even just one life is spared by increasing public awareness, the efforts will be well worth it.

Distracted driving comes at an enormous cost. Lives are ended or drastically changed, and families like mine face the additional legal and medical monetary costs. I think that new cell phone laws should be considered, and that local governments should invest in some quality media resources to educate the public about the real cost of distracted driving. American roads could be so much safer if a new generation of drivers understands the risks that they expose themselves and others to if they do not pay close attention while driving. I hope that in the years to come, I can share my personal experience to encourage other drivers not to put their lives or others' lives in jeopardy by getting distracted on the road.